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Memory politics in contemporary Russia

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Propositions belonging to the PhD thesis
Memory Politics in Contemporary Russia
Television, Cinema and the State

by Mariëlle Wijermars

1. In contemporary Russia, the central government has increasingly actively employed cultural memory to claim the political legitimacy of those in power and discredit all forms of political opposition.
2. Russian memory politics is a socio-cultural process, rather than a strictly political process; to gain a full understanding of its dynamic development, the actions of the state in this domain should be analysed together with the activities of those cultural and non-governmental actors who take part in the public discourse on history and politics.
3. When viewed within its socio-cultural context, it becomes apparent that the Russian state's memory politics during the period 2000-2012 can be characterised as pragmatic and adaptive – it was continually revised in response to changing (geo)political circumstances and domestic needs – and, at times, reactive – it co-opted existing societal and cultural initiatives.
4. Whether a cultural memory has a rich remediation history – a build-up of available and recognisable narrative and visual representations, as well as associated monuments or commemorative practices – is a major determining factor for its utility for memory politics.
5. To adopt a research approach that focuses exclusively on governmental memory politics means that challenges to official memory politics will be missed or insufficiently valued.
6. To reach a wide audience and garner support for its memory politics, the Russian government both relies and depends on television and cinema.
7. State control over the representation of history in cinema and television in the period 2000-2012 was indirect and diffuse and depended in great measure on a system of self-censorship and (financial) incentives.